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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet on teaching adults is the fifth of 16 in a series to provide leaders in adult activities with sound introductory material to give practical help in using a method of adult education or working in a particular area. Its objective is to help adult teachers in a variety of institutional settings who specialize in teaching many different subjects. Nine articles and how-tos are included. "Improving Your Teaching" suggests a frame of mind and some ideas to get started. "What is Learning?" examines some complexities in the teaching-learning process. "Who Hasn't Acted This Way?" pokes fun at some things teachers and students do to prevent themselves from learning. Attention is given to ways in which adult learners differ from children in "Adults as Learners." "Planning for Growth" is intended to sensitize the teacher to conditions which can make learning easier in classroom groups. "Using Informal Methods" and "Ideas for Technical Subjects" suggest some specifics for organizing materials and methods into new and more rewarding patterns. An idea is offered in "When Students Drop Out" on the problem of the teacher of the non-compulsory class. The final article, "Adults Evaluate Themselves," considers methods of evaluation that must necessarily be different from those used with younger students. (YLB)

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**Leadership Pamphlets are prepared and distributed by the Adult Education Association of the U.S.A. Each pamphlet provides leaders in adult activities with sound introductory material which can give practical help in using an important method of adult education or working in a particular area with insight and skill.**

**Pamphlets in this series are:**

P1 —How to Lead Discussions
P2 —Planning Better Programs
P3 —Taking Action in the Community
P4 —Understanding How Groups Work
P5 —How to Teach Adults
P6 —How to Use Role Playing
P7 —Supervision and Consultation
P8 —Training Group Leaders
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P15—Streamlining Parliamentary Procedure
P16—Training in Human Relations

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## A TEN-POINT CHECK-OUT BEFORE TAKE-OFF

What goes into the planning a leader or trainer does before beginning to lead his group? Here is one trainer's set of questions:

1. What goals do I see as relevant for this group or its members?
2. Where is this group in its growth as a group?
3. What do the members expect this group to be like? What do they expect to get out of it?
4. Where are the individual members in their personal development toward the growth goals?
5. What are some necessary "next steps" for the members?
6. Which "next step" is most likely to be attainable and most useful today?
7. What resources are there in the group situation, in the members, and in myself which will help get this next step accomplished?
8. How can these resources be meshed to be most effective?
9. What resistances or destructive forces might arise? How can these be used profitably?
10. What cues or indications will appear to let us know when we have achieved the next step? How can they be pointed out so the members can feel success?

By David H. Jenkins

# INTRODUCTION

Although new areas of adult education have been opening, and new procedures have been developed, the classroom setting is still widely used in adult education —not only in the programs of the schools and colleges— but in those of religious, industrial, labor, agricultural, and community groups as well. The materials in this pamphlet are intended to help adult teachers in a great variety of institutional settings who specialize in teaching many different subjects.

The adult teacher's job is not easy. Each has to come to grips first with the problem of understanding *what* he is trying to teach. This is different from the usual "content" of the course; many teachers know their subject-matter, but are still not aware of what they are teaching. It may sound trite, but inevitably we are teaching, not English or typing, but the "whole adult," and we must be clear about the kinds of change — in attitudes, knowledge, or skill—we are attempting to promote.

The teachers in each field and subject-matter must determine these goals for themselves. This pamphlet could not attempt to discuss the variety of goals to be found in the wide range of situations where adult teaching goes on. It is concerned, rather, with a few of the problems common to all teachers of adults: What are adult students like — and how do they learn? What methods can we use in teaching them, and how do we improve our teaching?

"Improving Your Teaching" suggests a frame of mind and some ideas with which to get started.

"Who Hasn't Acted This Way?" pokes a little fun at some of the things all of us — teachers and students — sometimes do to prevent ourselves from learning anything when we get into a classroom.

"What is Learning?" examines some of the complexities in the teaching-learning process, and "Adults as Learners" gives particular attention to the ways in which adult learners differ from children.

"Planning for Growth" is intended to sensitize the teacher to a number of conditions which can make learning easier in classroom groups.

"Using Informal Methods" and "Ideas for Technical Subjects" suggest some specifics for organizing materials and methods into new and more rewarding patterns for both students and teachers.

"When Students Drop-Out" has an idea to offer on the age-old problem of the teacher of the non-compulsory class.

Any teacher who has ever asked, "I wonder if they really learn anything?" will be interested in "Adults Evaluate Themselves".

The material in this pamphlet is, of course, only a start. Other sources of help are listed on the inside back cover. Although some of these materials speak in terms of leading rather than of teaching, we must remember that, in some of its major elements, the role of the teacher of adults is similar to that of the adult leader. Much has been written in *Adult Leadership* and elsewhere about leadership. A review of those materials, with his own job in mind, may be worthwhile for any teacher.

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# *IMPROVING YOUR TEACHING*

Is there really any hope that a teacher can improve —and continue to improve—his teaching? Does successful teaching depend upon adopting a particular teaching method? Does it depend upon having a particular type of personality?

These are disquieting questions to one who is concerned about his teaching. Here are my answers:

Teachers can improve; they don't need complete psychoanalysis; and not everyone can use the same methods equally successfully.

Let's take an example. Bob, one of our graduate students, was a brilliant theoretician. In all of his academic work he was outstanding. There was no question that he knew psychology, but when he began to teach it, his students almost revolted. After the first four weeks of the semester, his students were asked to evaluate his teaching.

Here are some of their comments:

"Mr. Smith has convinced me that he knows his material, but he is way over my head."

"I have no idea what we are supposed to be getting either from textbooks or lectures."

"Mr. Smith does right by his material, but not by his students."

Naturally Bob was concerned about these reactions. It would have been natural for him to say, "These students are just stupid. If the material is over their heads, it is their fault for not studying more. I'll simply tell them they'll have to work harder."

Fortunately Bob thought instead, "What can I do about this?" He came to me with some anxiety, but with a willingness to make any changes which would produce better results.

There was no doubt that he was spending enough time in preparation. His lecture materials were carefully worked out to insure complete coverage of the topic. However, it was obvious to him that he had to change the level of his lectures. How was he to know when he had reached the appropriate level?

In discussing this we decided that he needed more prompt and continuous feedback from the students if he was to keep the presentation on their level. Perhaps if the classroom atmosphere were less formal, if the students participated more, their discussion would provide cues to their understanding of the material.

"But," Bob said, "if I let the students talk, how can I cover the material? I'm crowded for time now. Still—I guess it doesn't do me much good to cover the material if the students don't get it. Maybe I shouldn't worry so much about covering everything."

Bob was particularly puzzled by the student's comment that he didn't know what he was to get from the course. "Why did he sign up if he doesn't know what he wants to get out of the course?" Bob asked. "I suppose this is a new field to the students, and I know it isn't what they expected, but what can I do?"

After some discussion we decided that he might work out study questions for the students to take home. He tried devising these questions to focus on major points in the assignments. He handed these questions out in advance. Frequently these questions came up again during the class period and often stirred up lively discussions. When student evaluations were collected six weeks later, Bob's students rated him a very good teacher.

The point of Bob's experience is not to suggest that everyone should use study questions. Rather, it is intended to indicate how improvement can result from getting feedback from the students themselves.

This article is based upon the assumption that the purpose of education is to bring about changes *in students*. If we agree with this assumption, it is apparent that information from students is required to provide a basis for improved teaching. Student evaluation of instruction is a relatively direct method of obtaining this information. But there are other sources of feedback available to the

instructor. What are they?

A venerable one is the classroom examination. If the students have learned what the teacher thinks he has taught, the teacher in turn should be able to learn this from whatever techniques of evaluation or examination he uses. Too often the instructor simply checks off errors automatically, with little thought of interpreting them to find out the general areas in which students did poorly and where they did well. The instructor thus loses a potentially valuable source of feedback.

Another source of feedback which is even more valuable because it is immediate, is the behavior of students in class. One of the most useful features of class discussion is that it so well reveals the misconceptions, biases, and emotional reactions of the students. The teacher who minimizes student participation dams up one of his most useful channels of feedback.

However, even in the lecture hall the instructor can get many cues for improving his teaching. While few teachers can ignore students who are sleeping or reading newspapers, many of us fail to note restless shifting of position, blank stares, whispered asides, and other indications that the students are not with us.

As a third source of feedback the teacher can use individual conferences with students outside of class. While these students are often not typical of the entire class group, their problems sometimes indicate possible inadequacies in instruction which the teacher can use as cues for improvement.

## more sources of feedback

My emphasis thus far upon feedback from students has undoubtedly raised some questions. Some readers may be saying, "Our job is to educate students, not to please them. Making students happy doesn't necessarily contribute to education."

This point is well taken. Research on teaching methods has not thus far shown a consistent relationship between student satisfaction and student achievement. It seems obvious that the student must give some interest and attention to his work in order to learn, and student reactions are therefore valuable. But it is probably fallacious to assume that what the student says he likes is

always what contributes most to his education. Hence the teacher should not rely upon the student as his only source of help in teaching. Let's now turn to some other sources.

One of the most frequently neglected aids is the advice of colleagues. Sometimes teachers seem afraid to discuss their teaching methods with other teachers or to ask for advice in handling some teaching problem. Our insecurity about our teaching is so great that it is almost unheard of for a teacher to visit a colleague's class. Yet in our University of Michigan program for training college teachers, the trainees report that they gain much from discussing teaching problems with their colleagues, from observing other teachers, and from suggestions by observers of their classes. I suspect that all of us dread having a colleague see us get tripped up on some simple question, but one of the things most difficult for the new instructor to learn is that other teachers get tripped up in the same way. Learning that one's problems are not unique is a wonderful remedy for the tenseness and anxiety which often characterize the new (and not so new) teacher.

## new ways in teaching

Thus far we have been primarily concerned with the problem of spotting our teaching weaknesses or of diagnosing difficulties. I have assumed that an intelligent teacher who learns of his errors will be able to change his teaching techniques for the better. This, however, assumes that he knows, or will be able to devise, other teaching techniques which will be more successful. Unfortunately this is not always the case. There are teachers who think reading from lecture notes is the only teaching method possible for their subject matter. How then may we increase our working repertoire of teaching techniques?

First of all, of course, we may learn about techniques other teachers use. Talking about teaching, observing other teachers, and reading journals such as ADULT LEADERSHIP are ways of becoming acquainted with the techniques other people are trying.

Have you tried buzz groups, role playing, nondirective discussion, directed discussion, field trips, or

guest experts? These are some of the methods available to add variety to your teaching. But the problem then remains, "How can I put these into practice?"

As one of my trainees said, "I've read all about role playing. I'm convinced it would be useful in my class, but I'm scared to death to try it."

What are the barriers which keep us from trying new teaching techniques? One of them is simply effort. Usually it is easier to teach a class as we've done in the past than to try something new. This barrier is probably not so hard to overcome if we have used the diagnostic information discussed earlier and are aware of weaknesses in our teaching.

A far more important barrier to change is fear of loss of status. To most of us the status of the teacher is a cherished reward for years of study. To be an authority who dispenses crumbs of wisdom to the multitudes is a very satisfying role. Trying a new technique may involve a threat to the teacher's status. If the new method fails, the students are likely to feel that the teacher doesn't know what he's doing. But even if it works, it may mean some change in the teacher's status. For example, permitting student participation means that more embarrassing questions are likely to be asked, that less emphasis will be placed on learning from the instructor, and that his leadership may be challenged by aggressive, intelligent students.

A third barrier is simply fear of failure. A teacher who tries a new technique is not likely to be skilled in its use, and is likely to imagine consequences far more catastrophic than any which are likely to occur. In using a new technique the instructor may feel that he is losing control of the situation and that anything may happen.

Another barrier is fear of unfavorable reactions from colleagues. Even when a new teaching method is successful the instructor is likely to feel that other professors feel he is deserting the tried and true academic traditions in order to curry student or administration favor.

## how do we make the change?

Overcoming these barriers depends first of all upon being sure of the reasons for trying a new technique.

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Leadership Pamphlet #5

A practical aid to leaders in education, government, welfare, health, farm, labor, religion, industry and the community . . .

# HOW TO TEACH ADULTS

This pamphlet explores such aspects of the teaching-learning process as:

- understanding learners
- planning for growth
- using informal methods
- liberalizing technical subjects
- handling drop-outs
- student evaluation

Adult Education Association of the U.S.A.

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Unless we have thought through the goals, we may miss any evidences of success in the use of a new method. This is particularly important because these evidences of success are among the most important rewards we can get.

A second aid in overcoming barriers is to try new techniques in a group in which we are secure and from which we can expect cooperation. This may mean making the first trial in our best class. In some cases it may even be worth while to ask for volunteers to join a special section of the class which will experiment with a new learning method. Those who volunteer thus will not be shocked by changes in the teacher's behavior and usually will give the method a fair trial.

A third aid in putting new methods into practice is to gain group support. In our own teacher-training program we encourage formation of friendships among the teacher trainees; we encourage them to talk about methods, and discuss experiences in trying them out. This furnishes the instructors with emotional support, enables them to express their anxieties, and gives them the rewards of approval by friends for their trials of new methods. Such support can be found by almost every teacher. Almost always he can find others who enjoy teaching and who like to talk about it. Such an informal group can serve the same functions as our training group.

In discussing methods of diagnosing our teaching weaknesses and improving our methods, I have purposely avoided what is probably the basic problem in improving teaching. That is: "How do we build a different pattern of relationships with our students?"

This article is intended to help us sneak around our own emotional blocks to different relationships with students. By focusing attention on teaching methods we can sometimes make discoveries about student needs which might have evaded us through years of worrying about them. By finding teaching methods which elicit increased student interest, we may gain that approval of students which will give us enough security to build new relationships. In any case, the teacher who begins to improve his teaching will again discover that teaching is fun! ◇ ◇

# WHAT IS LEARNING

Just as we have tried to get away from formalism in our schools—with the best of intent but not always without some hitch or awkwardness in the process—so we have tried to turn away from formal methods and have turned to informal discussion as a way to get adult learning. Feeling that adult learning requires free and forthright exploration of issues, problems, points of view, we are coming to see that informal groups provide greater flexibility and fewer threatening situations than do traditionally structured, more formal groups. We feel that adults should have the opportunity to clarify their own experiences, their own feelings and ideas and relate these honestly to the materials of a discussion, to other members' feelings and ideas, to what other people have written on a subject, to what a film or speaker has shown or said. We sense that the authority relations between leader and members have somehow to be different from the traditional relations between parent and child or teacher and pupil if these desirable learnings are to occur.

But frequently the discussion which was supposed to be free and informal doesn't work out to produce the learning processes and outcomes we seek. Members hold back from giving their honest opinions. They want the book or the film or the teacher to give them the answers. When the leader discourages dependence on his ideas or preferences, members may hesitate to face up to the issue and prefer to chat about safe and trivial topics. Or they may argue with the leader and with other members on minor points with greater heat and hostility than the issues warrant. The leader, too, finds himself at times, even against his good intentions, acting like an old-fash-

ioned teacher, rewarding and punishing on his own, keeping order for the sake of order, even though he knows that the learnings and experiences he hopes the group will achieve won't come in any such way.

Whatever else it may be, learning is change. We live in some sort of equilibrium with our environment, and in our continuous efforts to adjust to our environment, we learn. To make adjustments, we must change, and in the changing we learn to do and be something we were not before. But we resist change. Change requires effort. It requires the admission that answers which we once thought sound and satisfactory are no longer valid, and this often in situations where we may have come to feel that yielding our authority or power, or admitting our limitations, inadequacies, or inconsistencies is debasing. We like to believe we are already adults—that we have attained a good measure of growth—and we spend a good deal of effort, time, and money trying to convince others and ourselves of the validity of this belief. We resist change in part to avoid the pain of self disapproval and social condemnation.

And as we try to change, we often discover that we are at odds with ourselves and with our fellows. We are often beset by feelings of anxiety, fear, or guilt when we find that the change we wish to effect brings us into conflict with established patterns of behavior or thought. We are likely to deny the existence of our feelings of conflict and to seek for ways of justifying our denial. Maintaining some sort of pretense becomes a lifelong, tortuous task. To pretend to be upright, consistent, noble, loving, kind, and at the same time to pretend that we are not also inconsistent, ig-

noble, hateful, and unkind doesn't heal our conflict. It exaggerates our difficulties and calls for further defenses of our pretensions. It doesn't resolve the conflict; it merely conceals it. We fail, perhaps, to realize just what troubles us. To deal sanely with our conflicting selves, we have to recognize first that they exist.

Today most of us admit intellectually that in learning something new we must deal with a certain amount of resistance to change, both within ourselves and among our fellows. Most of us realize too that we can't relearn anything very fundamental without conflict in ourselves. Why is it, then, that we run into trouble in our discussion groups in dealing with these problems openly and effectively when they occur?

Partly we react as we do because we have learned a way of learning which doesn't square with our psychological insights. This way of learning, based largely on previous experience going back into childhood and on nonlogical language habits, erects certain barriers to our getting the learnings we want out of discussion groups. In a sense what we often need to do in a discussion group is to learn a new way of learning as well as a new subject matter.

## *EARLY EXPERIENCES*

The adult personality, we all recognize, has been conditioned by early experiences. The learning patterns of the adult—the ways by which he knows how to learn—reflect the ways in which he learned as a child. To understand the conceptions and attitudes which adults bring to a learning group, it may be helpful to review the basic characteristics of the traditional teaching situations in which most of us learned to learn as children.

Evidence from child-guidance clinics, counseling centers, social work agencies, and psychiatric practice, supports the view that the most important influences on the child's personality stem from his relations to parents

and other members of his family. Next in importance as an influence on the child's personality are probably his early school experiences. The public school represents the major deliberate effort of society to influence and develop the rising generations of adults. How have traditional homes and schools influenced people to look at learning, to see themselves in relation to learning situations?

## *ARBITRARY AUTHORITY*

Parents and teachers traditionally have employed arbitrary authority as one of the chief means for controlling children. This control has led to undesirable results. Children have become fearful, anxious, defensive, and dependent. Their spontaneity for constructive learning has been inhibited. They have feared to challenge adult authority, especially the authority of those adults upon whom they depend for the satisfaction of their needs. Parents and teachers have taken advantage of their positions of authority. In order to release their own personal tensions they have tended to use children as victims.

Arbitrary authority assumes many forms. It may show up as corporal punishment, nagging, scolding, sermonizing, rejection or over-protection. Authority is arbitrary when the person under authority is not given sufficient consideration in its exercise. His feelings, interests, and attitudes are minimized or ignored. The feelings and wishes of the parent or teacher determine the pattern of behavior required.

Parents and teachers are arbitrarily authoritarian because they feel threatened. If a person has his power challenged, he feels insecure, especially when he depends for his security upon a sense of superiority in the field of experience where the challenge occurs, whether the field is table manners or arithmetic.

In the confused and complicated world of today relatively few of us have the opportunity to acquire the status and prestige which genuine self-expression requires. So we become practical, that is, we surrender the discovery of self and pursue the goals which others impose upon us. But the quest for self-knowledge is not easily suppressed. Many adults have within themselves gnawing feelings of

inadequacy and incompletion. They rarely talk from the heart—vested interests typically prohibit genuine communication concerning important matters. The average adult sees himself as more or less insignificant in a vast and mercilessly competitive society. He is less often aware of the hostility, aggression, or submission within himself which he has accumulated over his earlier years in his relations to parents and teachers, and in later years transferred to his competitive associates.

There are opportunities, however, for a release of these concealed tensions. Gossip, racial and religious discrimination, and public sports, as examples, afford an out. But the safest setting in finding an out is in dealing with children, especially one's own. Home is a man's castle where he can be king and do no wrong. With children, his understandable desire to control need not be curbed. Friction between parents and children or teachers and pupils is, most often, fundamentally a contest of wills, a struggle for power. The basic issue becomes, "Who is going to be boss?"

The child learns through these experiences with arbitrary authorities. It is the *quality* of the learning, the kinds of habits he acquires, which we should question. The child learns to submit when he feels he should object. He learns to lie to avoid punishment, and acquires feelings of guilt, self-disrespect, and anxiety. He learns to blame others for his failures; he learns to rationalize, to justify his actions beyond reason. He learns to repress his need to express himself. The over-all result is an adult who either fears to discover and express his genuine self-hood, or who insists upon dominating others to gain reassurance that he is not as insecure as he dimly perceives himself to be. There are, of course, many in-between types.

The child learns, too, to resist change. Change means differing. To be different means to assume risks of criticism and punishment. To avoid such risks a person had better deny his difference and submit to authority. Such submission is accompanied by the feelings of inferiority and inadequacy which, in later life, characterize our relations with others. In a word, we deny our individual differences in order to shield ourselves from the disapproval of others upon whom we are compelled to lean for that

reassurance which we do not obtain from ourselves. We learn to be afraid of our individuality.

## *TEACHING BY DEFINITION*

Teaching by definition is a method generally employed by keepers-of-the-text. The term "definition" is derived from the Latin, *de* and *finere*, "to end off." Telling students the correct definition of concepts "ends off" exploration and self-discovery. The students are blocked by the teacher's or the textbook's definitions. There is nothing for them to chew on, to challenge, to differ with. "Here it is. I'm telling you. Tell me back and we're through."

Now we are beginning to see that talking is not teaching and listening is not learning. The teaching-learning experience at its best is a quest for honest communication. What is a fact for one person, however, may be an empty verbal concept for another if the latter has no interest or problem to which the alleged fact is related. One of the chief functions of a teacher is to make knowledge available to the learner. The average teacher, however, fails to appreciate the degree to which the student's meanings for the words employed differ from the teacher's meanings, and the inability of students to translate the implications of many of the book's or teacher's ideas because they have no problems related to these ideas or concepts.

Knowledge is certainly important. It is the *import* of knowledge for the learner which is at issue. The teacher attempts to transmit knowledge by talking, by asking his questions or having the students answer the problems in the text. Learning, however, cannot take place unless and until the student translates and incorporates the knowledge in relation to his questions and his problems. What the data mean cannot be significant unless the student discovers what the data mean to him. Possessing verbalized ideas is one thing; being possessed by ideas is quite another matter. Genuine learning does not end in ideas but in muscle and gland, in changed behavior. A person learns as much as he has lived and organically experienced.

There is a significant difference between knowledge and understanding. Let's take a simple illustration. How many times has each of us joined in the singing of

*America?* "From every mountain side let freedom ring." "From every mountain side?" Does this phrase refer to the shacks of Kentucky mountains and the hovels in Pennsylvania? Should freedom ring for millions of disadvantaged and disenfranchised Negroes? "Sweet land of liberty?" Liberty for Jewish, Catholic, and Italian candidates to have equal opportunity for entrance to the colleges and medical schools of the country? Most of us know in the sense of having memorized, the first stanza of *America*, but few of us have understood it.

Giving information, handing out data in neat assignments or talks, and checking its return through recitation or examination is the easiest way to teach and also the easiest way to guarantee little learning. Passing social science is not the same as passing judgment on the concepts and information of the social sciences. Teaching by definition is much less demanding than developing the skills required in helping people to learn. The net product of teaching by definition is change in language, not growth in understanding.

## *AN ACCEPTING ATMOSPHERE*

If in our discussion groups we can communicate to others that we understand how they think and feel but that we are not judging them or condemning them, we will have made a prime move in helping people change their old patterns of learning. If, in relation to the discussion leader or other group members, a person feels accepted no matter what he utters, and understood whatever his attitude, he is freed to face his ambivalences squarely. His fears and anxieties concerning personal and social disapproval are gradually reduced. He needn't remain or become defensive. No one is attacking, blaming, or condemning him. He doesn't feel threatened or fearful. No one insists on making him other than he wishes to be or to become. His integrity is respected. Not having to fight against others imposing their will on him, he is left free to struggle, or not to struggle, with his own.

Learning to express his differences in an atmosphere which carries no threat, a person can face himself, assume responsibility for thoughtful choices and decisions, recognize his weaknesses, use his strengths without defensively imposing them on others, and accept help from

others. In the free and open exchange of ideas and feelings between the members of the group, no one needs to be competitive, no one has to win or prove himself right, no one has to be exposed to ridicule, sarcasm or condemnation. Together the members explore ideas or situations, test their insights, old and new, through the combined contributions and helpful criticisms of all the members and the leader. Feeling the support of others, recognizing the common failings and uncertainties of all, being understood, being left free to make their own decisions, being respected for their unique contributions—these attitudes and feelings about standards lead members of a group to want to help each other, to grow together and to work together. In such a cooperative atmosphere the individual doesn't need to feel isolated, unsure of himself, hostile, competitive, or defensive. He can be himself and also feel that he belongs to the group.

To create an atmosphere of discussion free from fear, from arbitrary authority, an atmosphere in which language, feelings, and attitudes can be honestly examined, sets several requirements upon the learning group:

1. A non-judgmental attitude, that is, the absence of a narrowly moralistic attitude, on the part of the leader and other members of the group;
2. A realization by all group members that all motivation and all significant learning are, in the final analysis, personal;
3. The acceptance as a group standard of the member's right to be different and to disagree;
4. A realization in the group that all genuine growth stems from the creative power within the individual.

## *THE LEADER CAN HELP*

Because of anxieties developed in childhood experiences with authority, many group members are slow to trust a leader's attitude that he wants members to be their spontaneous selves. The leader should recognize this defensive attitude and accept it. As the meetings progress, members gradually realize that there are no risks in expressing themselves spontaneously. As a consequence, they become more and more involved in relating their own experiences to the discussion.



The members may do what they will with the help

offered them. They can modify, change, or persist in their views. The leader cannot feel, think, or struggle for the members. Every individual learns only what he can psychologically afford to learn. The leader can only create favorable circumstances to encourage learning—by freeing the members to examine themselves and the material being considered.

Every effective group discussion must have some limits and some focus, and part of the leader's job is to help the group to define these. The members bring a purpose or purposes, more or less clarified. The leader brings a service which he can offer to help them meet their needs. As the meetings proceed, the needs the members felt they had at first may be modified by what occurs. Not all needs of the several members are relevant, but only those which can be related to the purposes which develop in the group.

As members work to articulate their needs, they become actively and creatively involved. They are participating in their own development. This kind of creative learning is different in quality from the negative learning which characterizes learning in the authoritarian situation. In the latter situation, people learn to avoid threat and challenge, to justify not changing; they really learn how to avoid learning. With active participation in his own development and in that of others in the group, a person is encouraged to re-examine language habits, feelings, attitudes, and institutions as these are called into question.

And the leader, while he accepts the members' feelings and comments, also has the responsibility to clarify inarticulate feelings which members may have or doubts which they may entertain. He realizes that most people rarely have a clear, concious picture of how they actually feel about things. At the proper time, therefore, he may suggest that a different point of view from any previously considered in the discussion may be entertained. If there is good rapport, trust and confidence, and a genuine feeling of respect between leader and members, it is much more likely that the members will not be defensive when he offers alternatives for discussion. The leader can use his leadership to create an active, constructive learning situation. ◇◇

# Who hasn't acted this way?

Who of us hasn't observed some of these behaviors in others? On second thought—to come closer home—who hasn't observed some of them in himself?

They are not to be confused with the seven deadly sins.

They are, rather, exaggerations of normal and useful aspects of human behavior. Such exaggerations are brought out by the stresses and uncertainties of the training situation, much as a man may raise his feet unnecessarily high when walking upstairs in the dark.

And once started, these exaggerations may become fixed ways of behaving, stereotyping us in the minds of other group members and serving us as ready-made, training-proof shelters against changing.

***"THIS IS JUST THE SAME OLD STUFF."***

**The trainee has a right to expect some new insights or skills. If you think you've heard, seen, and done all this before—and the advance publicity promised you something different—why not ask when the group is going to deal with the material you expected?**

***"THEORY'S FINE, BUT LET'S GET DOWN TO PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES."***

**The trainee needs to learn to apply theory in solving practical problems. True enough. But instead of opposing theory to practice as though they somehow got in one another's way, why not ask what light the theory sheds on the practical problems you face?**

**"YOU TELL US. YOU'RE THE EXPERT HERE."**

The training leader is, let us hope, an expert in training. And his very expertness leads him to believe that unless you take part in contributing ideas, facts, experiences, and active cooperation, you will not learn or change much. Futhermore, you are depriving your fellow trainees of your help if you do not contribute to the common effort.

**"NONE OF THIS APPLIES TO MY SITUATION."**

The trainee needs to see applications of the training to his own problems. If you don't see how the training applies, why not ask? Try to see what aspects of your own job present problems similar to those the training group is working on.

**"ISN'T THIS WONDERFUL? IT'S SO GOOD FOR US!"**

Enthusiasm and involvement are assets in training. Becoming ecstatic, however, blinds one to what benefits one should and should not expect from a training program. The ability to keep emotions under some rein, however loose, is as valuable in training as in most other public situations.

**"I'M DOING ALL RIGHT AS I AM. WHY CHANGE?"**

True. If you weren't doing all right in many ways, there might not be much point in your training to do better. Good training assumes that trainees have successes in their record. But why not concentrate, while in a training situation, on identifying the ways in which you can improve?

# *ADULTS AS LEARNERS*

In the very real context of the classroom a large number of teachers have had extensive contacts with adult students. During the past two years many of these teachers have taken part in faculty seminars conducted by the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults in which they discussed ways of improving their teaching. In the considered opinion of teachers, the adult can learn. His educability, however, may be limited by a number of characteristics.[6]

1) "The fear of self, which may take the form of inferior feelings or marked diffidence resulting from his long absence from the classroom; 2) lack of association or personal uncertainties in his economic or community status, 3) fear of others that may stem from such reasons as have just been mentioned or from the bruising contacts of the work-a-day world; 4) fear of ideas issuing, in part, from conservatism, from the sluggishness of routine, and in part, no doubt, from the strong cultural compulsions of our system.

"These fears may add up to a tenacious mind-set—or resistance to the assimilation of new ideas. They may stand as a block to the learning process and effective adaptations to change. The adult student may be threat-oriented rather than problem-oriented at the outset, thus challenging all of our ingenuity to provide reassurance and the restoration of confidence. Another handicap is lack of continuity in his pursuit of education, the fact that the adult may be in and out of the classroom over a period of many years, with frequent interruptions or long absences, and the time lag between his secondary schooling and his entrance into our adult classes.

"We believe that in many instances the adult student is seriously confused about what the academic program

has to offer and as to how it can help him. Unfortunately, he is seldom offered guidance and counseling; he is left to reshape his expectations and resolve his confusions as best he may. Moreover, even if the student is neither fearful nor confused, he is likely to be unused to academic procedures and may from the very first be resentful of the ritual of registration, enrollment, and other formal routines of schooling.

"On the positive side may be included the adult's eagerness for learning and his spirit of inquiry born of years of academic starvation; his relatively free scope of action, owing to the fact that he is less circumscribed or distracted by academic trappings and campus frivolities; his self-identification with the adult educational program which he seeks by his own volition and pursues at his own expense; his more integrated purposes derived from the hard school of experience; his more coherent life program, built from the socialization process through years of childhood to the rounded personality of the autonomous adult. Further, the various dissatisfactions with himself and his social or economic situation which lead him to attend our classes may strengthen his desire to learn and make his thinking more critical."

Those who teach adults tend to corroborate findings of studies that there are many kinds of learnings to which adults are exposed and that the difficulties in teaching adults are of a different kind from those encountered among undergraduates and children. The obstacles to teaching are often intensified by the failure of teachers to adapt techniques to the adult personality. On the other hand, the adult's culturally imposed fears about his own abilities are sometimes too great to be overcome with anything less than the most expert understanding by the teacher. This places a heavy burden upon the adult educator who must not only prove to himself that he is confident of the adult's abilities, but must also transmit that confidence to the adult student.

Both student and teacher must recognize that the most precious ingredient the adult brings to the classroom is *experience*. In the lifelong process of constant change, older as well as younger persons acquire knowledge, skill, and habits; they are capable of changing their ways of thinking, feeling, and doing, because every adult is a cumulative, dynamic integration of experiences.

# PLANNING FOR GROWTH

MANY of us find ourselves spending considerable time working in group situations where one of our goals is to help individual growth and learning take place. We meet this problem on all sides in classrooms, in-service training activities, staff meetings, or in our regular organizational committee work. All of these situations give opportunity for experience which the members of these groups can utilize for their own personal growth.

When we plan to use groups for individual growth there are several important areas to consider.

1. What are the goals toward which change is desired? Which of these changes can take place through group experience?
2. What are the resources for change which a group offers an individual?
3. What are some ways in which groups can act if they are to help an individual to change?

## GOALS FOR CHANGE AND GROWTH

In some groups, there will be relatively few goals toward which the group tries to help an individual grow. Many classroom learning situations and, perhaps, many in-service training programs would probably have few stated goals. In other situations there may be much more freedom in helping a person to become more effective. Sometimes, however, we like to arrange our staff meetings so that, as the problems faced by the staff get dealt with satisfactorily, individual staff members get some new understandings of their professional work, or of themselves, or in some other ways make some general prog-

ress in their own personal development.

Those of us interested in helping a group supply an effective learning experience, need to become as clear as we can about the kinds of growth or learning that are legitimate and possible within that group. Having clear and attainable learning goals is extremely important if we wish to plan our own behavior, and if we wish to help the group think and act in ways to make changes in behavior.

We would want to ask ourselves some questions like these:

1. What are the immediate things which the participants can learn effectively in this group situation?
2. What are the long-range learnings which can be developed in this group?
3. What particular learnings can certain individuals get out of today's session? Can other individuals get other learnings?
4. Are the proposed learning goals actually shared by the people who will be doing the learning?

Although answers to questions like these are often hard to get, asking the questions helps a leader to clarify his thinking so that he can help a group select the activities which will most nearly accomplish the desired learnings.

## GROUP RESOURCES FOR CHANGE

***By supplying differences.*** One of the many assets a group situation offers in helping an individual to change is the differences which exist among group members. In almost any group of people there are some important differences of ideas, understandings, attitudes, information, or feelings. If differences do not exist in a group an individual will find little stimulation to change. If members in a group simply reflect a person's own thinking, or attitudes, or behavior, he will be confirmed and fixed in them rather than interested in a re-analysis or review of them. In planning for change, a trainer or leader may need to arrange the group environment so that differences are present in the area in which change and growth are desired. A leader may invite resource people into the group to provide some of the differences.

# GROWTH CHART

## *Conditions in groups ordin*

### POSITIVE GROWTH

***Communication***

1. purposeful, relevant
2. understandable language, common meanings achieved
3. different ideas and points of view expressed freely and positively
4. feelings expressed directly when essential

***Goals***

1. parallel or commonly-shared goals
2. use of group for growth; growth purposes clarified and/or understood
3. both group and individual goals are permitted and encouraged

***Atmosphere***

1. friendly, accepting, but realistic
2. collaboration-seeking
3. authorities analyzed and utilized
4. supportive and encouraging of change

***Responsibility and Involvement***

1. group allows and encourages individual to take responsibility for own growth
2. individual is personally identified with the group —its continuance and/or function are important to him

***Internal Processes***

1. group changes its methods of operation freely and flexibly as needs arise and group development and growth continues
2. group varies its tempo of work and allows itself periods of relaxation
3. group feels free to express its moods—excitement, enthusiasm, concern, tension, etc.

***Standards***

1. everyone in the group serves as resource to help group and each other
2. differences which are present in the group are useful
3. roles defined, but may easily move from member to member
4. member has chance to try out his new insights or skills in the group

*arily contributing toward:*

## NEGATIVE GROWTH

***Communication***

1. superficial, irrelevant
2. differential or specialized language, common meanings not achieved
3. differences kept hidden or expressed aggressively
4. feelings hidden, expressed indirectly through ideas

***Goals***

1. individualistic unshared goals
2. use of group for ego-satisfaction
3. a single group goal is defined and held to at all costs

***Atmosphere***

1. aggressive, hostile, or overfriendly, demanding
2. prestige-seeking
3. authorities demanded and accepted
4. hostile to change

***Responsibility and Involvement***

1. group discourages or denies individual's responsibility for growth—demands dependence
2. individual is not personally identified with the group—"it's just another group"

***Internal Processes***

1. group sets up a standard ritual (like "we must always be democratic" or "the leader tells us what to do—")
2. group sets up demands for a constant and continuing level of productivity
3. group does not allow any expression of mood other than polite friendliness

***Standards***

1. only leader or resource persons help others
2. differences must be kept "out of sight"
3. clearly defined and fixed roles are assigned to particular members
4. member given no opportunity to test out his new insights or skills

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***By offering agreements.*** Groups are important, too, because of the support and encouragement they provide for a person to think or feel as he does. This support is particularly important if we wish to help someone establish and maintain a different way of thinking. When a person becomes a member of a group which has new attitudes he can more easily maintain these new attitudes because of the support he gets from his group membership.

***By giving examples.*** As an individual has an opportunity to observe other people as they work in the group, he finds it possible, perhaps, to learn some of the techniques and ways of expression which he finds other people using effectively.

He can also secure new ideas about what kinds of solutions are possible to problems the group is working on. His new insights come as the result of the different experiences which others in the group have had or as the result of their different habits of thinking which permit them to come up with quite different kinds of solutions to a problem.

A particular area in which a group may be of help is that of presenting an individual with many examples of how he may explore problems.

Sometimes we may find it useful to consider a group situation as representing the same kinds of things which go on within our own individual thinking processes. In order to think we "talk to ourselves." It is hard for others to see how we go about solving a problem because we do not make obvious the various steps we go through and the kinds of questions we ask ourselves. When group members work together trying to solve a problem or to carry on an exploration, they need to speak their various thoughts out loud if their thoughts are to be useful to the group. The member who participates in a discussion where people feel free to speak most of their thoughts has a chance to see illustrations in the group of how different individuals go about dealing with problems. He can hear useful questions asked and see the kinds of responses which come to those questions. He can see explicit analyses taking place and become aware about how those analyses get carried on. He sees people in the process of searching for creative solutions and perhaps

can realize that such a process of searching can be carried on within his own thinking.

***By giving evaluations and reward.*** One of the major resources which a group can offer an individual can be serving as a source of information to him about how effectively he has been able to carry forward the change he is trying to create. We all have attempted in one way or another tó improve our effectiveness. We have undoubtedly also experienced the frustration of not knowing for sure whether we have been able to carry through our new behavior as we had intended. The differences between our intentions and the effects we produce are differences about which we cannot often become aware unless others give us information about the kinds of effects we are having.

Although it is often important for an individual to get a clear idea as to whether he has performed as he had anticipated, it is much more important for his own morale for him to know that the group recognizes his success and approves him for being successful. It is interesting to notice how rarely in many group situations the leader directly rewards or praises a member, and indeed, how rarely one member rewards or praises another. Yet if someone were to tell a member "You certainly did a clear bit of thinking there," he might be amazed at the gratitude the member showed and surprised at the increased participation which might occur. When the members of a group are generous and sincere in their approbation and support of one another, they encourage one another to grow and develop, to get new understandings and insights, as well as to feel more closely and surely a part of the group.

**If you are leading a group helping others, answers to these questions may help you understand each member better.**

1. Why is he in the group? What satisfaction does he receive or anticipate?
2. How is he accepted by others in the group?
3. What does he expect to get from the experience?
4. Is he able to understand what is going on in the group?
5. Where is he in his own stage of learning and

growth?

6. Are his motivations to change greater than his likely resistances?
7. What kinds of group resources will be most needed by him and useful to him?
8. Does he need careful encouragement and a minimum of failure and frustration?
9. Does he need clear and strong opposition to force a move toward self-examination and appraisal?
10. Whom in the group will he accept as a stimulus for change?

## HOW GROUPS CAN HELP

If the resources of the group are to be used as much as possible to aid individual growth, *there must be open communication in the group about anything where change is desired.* Without open communication there is likely to be little opportunity for the group members to stimulate, encourage or support change.

The members need to feel free to talk about things that they have on their minds. If they do not feel free to express differences, then other members of the group cannot avail themselves of the differences and use them. Similarly if they deny a member their statements of agreement and support for ideas which he has and feelings which he has, they deny him even more importantly the very kind of support which is most necessary if he is to maintain himself at some new level of growth. If they are not free to think productively, the individual member will not have a chance to see illustrations of effective thinking behavior.

In order to have open communication every group needs to take a positive attitude toward differences which are present in the group. Many of our groups have established very strong standards that differences are not nice—"We must all agree and be happy." This is an artificial condition where reality is not allowed to express itself. If differences which exist among the group members are to be put to good use, the members need to believe that differences are useful. People need to be encouraged to express different ideas, different attitudes, different ways of

thinking. Listeners will need to develop an interest in hearing those differences. They need to be actively trying to understand what others are thinking, and utilizing the differences they hear to sharpen up their own thinking. There are many ways of testing whether freedom to have and express differences exists:

1. Do the individual members in a group feel free to disagree with each other?
2. Do the individual members feel free to disagree with the leader or with any authority in the group?
3. How frequently are individual members encouraged to expand a different point-of-view, to give it a fuller explanation?
4. How often does a person who is expressing a disagreement get interrupted or cut off by someone else?
5. How often is there a sudden change in the direction of discussion by someone?
6. Have the group members been together long enough to understand and appreciate each other and their differences?

Sometimes the particular point under discussion may raise considerable heat or antagonism in the expression of different points of view. Under these conditions it is likely that the differences are expressed in such a way that the listener finds himself so busy trying to handle the antagonism and the strong feelings that are being expressed, that he cannot give thoughtful consideration to the ideas. One of the important jobs in a group is for the leader or members to set up a situation in which the group members can express differences in such a way that other members of the group listen to these in terms of the ideas being expressed, not in terms of the feelings or antagonisms they have about some of the people present. The group members must have a willingness to accept each other.

Antagonisms against personalities intrude in the process of reaching agreement, too. If one person has had an argument with another and is feeling somewhat antagonistic, he finds it rather difficult to accept the other's state-

ment of agreement as an honest one. Under other conditions he may find himself wanting to change his ideas if someone toward whom he feels antagonistic starts to agree with them. It is more important for him to stay "on the opposite side of the road" than it is to deal directly with the ideas under consideration.

Another requirement for using differences is to make sure that they are really understood by the listeners. We need to pay close attention while the person himself deals with or attempts to express the nature of a difference or a problem as he sees it. We find often enough that he has re-expressed those different ideas in such a way that meaningful differences were destroyed. We cannot safely assume that because a different idea was expressed in the group, it has been understood.

**When you use the group situation to promote individual growth, you must be willing to—**

1. Get *your* goals clear--recognize that goals are multiple.

   With confused or vague goals you will lack criteria for judging behavior; you may inadvertently find yourself working in areas of change which are not appropriate for the group.

2. Accept the responsibilities involved in changing people.

   You must be sure the changes are desired by the participants, and you must be sure adequate safeguards are established so the experience is a positive one.

3. Plan carefully and specifically.

   Advance planning requires careful preparation for setting the tone of the group and relating the detailed plans to the purposes.

4. Be sensitive to what is happening to the individuals in the group.

   The point of change and growth is in the individual participant; he is the one to be understood and helped if growth is to occur.

5. Know specifically what *you* are trying to do.

6. Keep your change attempts within your resources and capabilities.

   Do not enter a problem area unless you are sure it can be carried to a positive conclusion. ◇◇

# *USING INFORMAL METHODS*

When a student enters an adult class for the first time, he expects it to resemble the classes he knew in grade school, high school, or college. For most people this means a formal situation, with teacher firmly in control and the students doing only what they're told to do.

Faced with such expectations, the teacher of adults is often led to the despairing conclusion that his students want it that way and there's nothing much he can do about it.

But this conclusion, as experienced teachers know, "ain't necessarily so." The fact that adult students usually *expect* formality does not mean that all of them desire it. Whether they desire it or not depends in large part upon how they have learned to react to formality from childhood onward.

This article directs its attention primarily toward the teacher or leader who consciously desires to move his adult group from its initial expectancy of formality along the path toward informality.

The suggestions that follow have been developed out of experience with adult learning groups in government, universities, labor, and industry. The question is: "What can you do as a teacher to move toward the creation of an informal environment?

There are few things worse than forced informality. To try to be something you are not comes across with all the validity of a three-dollar bill. It is said that children and dogs can spot phoney attitudes. So can adults.

Everyone cannot be equally informal. Some teachers can sit casually and informally on a desk top and others cannot. We recognize individual differences in students at all levels; we must recognize individual differences in teachers. The suggestions for the development of informality that follow are applicable only if they are in harmony with the temperament and personality of the teacher. Fortunately, most people are somewhat flexible in their abilities to behave formally or informally.

If the teacher regards himself as authoritative and behaves in a controlling fashion, the result is likely to be a formal environment. If on the other hand, the teacher regards himself as one whose primary function is to help release the fullest potential of all members of the group to deal with the problems of the group, then he is likely to behave in a different fashion, and establish a less formal environment.

## *THE TEACHER SETS THE TONE*

The leader, in other words, is apt to set the tone. *Attitudes are caught, not taught.* This applies in organizations and classrooms as well as it does in the family. If the teacher can permit himself to be called by his first name or, more significantly, can permit himself to be criticized by members of his group, this example will set a standard of behavior likely to permeate the group.

The central characteristic of an informal group is freedom on the part of people in the group to express themselves and their feelings both positively and negatively. If the teacher shows by his behavior that he is willing to accept wide freedom of expression, he will have made the most crucial contribution to an informal atmosphere.

If the goal is to release the full potential of the group to cope with its problems, then the teacher will think not *for* his group, not *about* his group, but *with* his group. His chief aim will be to use his influence to keep channels of communication very wide, very open, and very clear. Let's now attempt to spell out some specific methods by which this kind of informal climate has been achieved in adult groups.

In the beginning the teacher presents materials without divulging his viewpoint concerning them. Thus he focuses responsibility for the interpretation and discussion of these materials directly upon members of the group. If a teacher divulges his own views early in the process, he can stifle creative thinking and free expression. Those who fear him because he controls their grades or can influence their jobs or their lives, may either become dependent upon him or resist whatever he says. The most helpful thing a teacher can do at the outset is to make it easy for all group members to think and speak out freely.

about the problem at hand. This the teacher accomplishes by accepting without evaluation any view presented, and by attempting to understand it and help clarify it if necessary. In the beginning the teacher should be hyper-alert to any cue indicating readiness to speak, and he should encourage widespread, honest expression. In the beginning the teacher is a warm, understanding, respectful, accepting, permissive figure who poses, or helps to pose, the problems with which the group must deal, but whose personal views are not expressed.

The teacher's neutrality and warm, enigmatic quality in the beginning makes it impossible to develop an unthinking dependence upon his views, because he expresses none. Consequently, the teacher throws the group back upon its own resources and viewpoints.

As a starter, any provocative material in line with the purposes of the meeting can be used. A problem can be presented orally, or in written form, and left open-ended for projection and analysis by members of the group; a film can be shown and treated similarly. A case study, selected passages from a textbook, or a magazine article will also serve. In one instance the writer used reproductions of Chief Justice Warren's opinion in the segregation cases. Any stimulus material will do as long as it concentrates upon an issue meaningful to the meeting, and as long as the teacher does not inhibit expression through a premature statement of his own views.

The physical facilities and arrangement of a meeting room can be important in determining the degree of informality it is possible to obtain. It helps, for instance, for members of a group to be able to see and hear each other easily. As the possibility for eye-to-eye contact between group members increases, the chances for interaction increase. Circular seating, where possible, is best; semicircular seating, next best. A conventional classroom arrangement is *least* conducive to the development of an informal climate.

When a group is large it may be subdivided into smaller project groups for a portion of its total life. When these small groups have been permitted to select their own task and to wrestle with the problem in their own way, interaction is often created which gets this kind of student evaluation:

"All in all I can say the values from this type of an experience—group work—have been wonderful for me. The chance to really get acquainted with five other members of our class to the point that I'm sure I shall know them the rest of my life! This type of activity affords better understanding; the knowledge of other group members is communicated one with another. I am convinced it is a method of securing knowledge far greater than a lecture-type class."

## *EVERY ONE A TEACHER*

One of the greatest values of informal group methods is well described in the following excerpt from a student comment:

"The varied backgrounds of experience in our group gave us something we would never get from sitting in a lecture class, memorizing and regurgitating material as experienced by one person, the teacher."

Some psychotherapists are beginning to say that the doctor is not always the best agent of healing for his patients. Successful experiments now being carried on in veterans' hospitals bring together in groups patients, nurses, recreational and occupational therapists, ward attendants, and doctors. These experiments have shown that anyone who develops a relationship with one of the patients can become the therapist (teacher) for that patient.

Similarly, in adult groups of more conventional types the best agent of education, or of creative and productive thinking for any given person, is not always the designated teacher. The best agent may well be another member, or several other members, of the group. At the very least, members other than the teacher may have great value as auxiliary agents of education or in providing creative stimulus.

All this potential richness in a group cannot be released if individuals do not interact, and interaction is easiest in an informal atmosphere where there is freedom to express ideas as well as both positive and negative attitudes and feelings.

It is also more fun to be where we can be active when the desire exists, and more satisfying to be able to discharge reactions as they develop. The whole process of interaction promises greater involvement of people than does

relative passivity.

## *USING DEMONSTRATION*

Wherever possible, demonstration should be encouraged. Demonstration has been used in industrial groups where the problem is "how does a supervisor give proper direction to a subordinate," or "how does a staff man solicit the cooperation of a line man." It has been used in labor groups where the problem is "how to most effectively present a grievance to an arbitrator." It has been used in teacher groups where the problem is "how to handle an irate parent;" in women's groups where the problem is "how to chair a discussion;" and in business groups where the problem is "how to conduct a conference." In each of these, and in similar cases, it is usually more effective to have people demonstrate how they would handle a situation than to have them simply tell how they would do it. Demonstration is more effective for several reasons:

1. The group is given a mutual, live experience to think about.
2. People are permitted to compare their own ideas with a demonstration of how a situation should be handled.
3. It permits the teacher to call for contrasting demonstrations from members of the group to see the situation handled in different ways.
4. Members of the group can compare the effectiveness of different ways of handling the situation.
5. It permits discovery of discrepancies between what demonstrators want to accomplish and what they actually seem to be accomplishing.
6. It reduces the formality of a learning situation by promoting activity and candid analysis of the demonstration.

The teacher must let it be known that he expects mistakes to be made in demonstrations and that a constructive analysis of the mistakes can contribute immensely to learning. If people are free to make mistakes without undue fear of judgment, an essential ingredient of an informal climate will have been attained.

Many of the values of live demonstrations can be captured through the analysis of tape recorded excerpts from the past life of the group itself, or from some source

outside the group concerning a problem with which the group can identify. A group from industry, for instance, has been able to use tape recorded excerpts with profit, which consist of a teacher attempting to deal with an irate parent. Material of this type is a stimulus to be used by a teacher in the same open-ended way as described earlier for cases, articles, and films.

## *THE RISKS OF INFORMALITY*

When the teacher resists the development of dependency upon him, several things are apt to happen. The most predictable is that stress and tension will develop because in an informal group differences of opinion, viewpoint, value, and feeling are bound to be expressed. These differences, bringing with them conflict and challenge, can be a constructive source of learning for the group.

Stress is energy. Nothing happens without energy. Like all energy, human stress can be channeled in constructive or destructive directions. A teacher who uses informal methods does so on the theory that they will best allow for the wholesome development, expression, and management of stress.

When controls are relaxed in an informal situation, very often Pandora's box emits some disturbing things. The most outstanding episodes usually are introduced by people who bring badly distorted perceptions or accumulated hostilities into the groups. If as a teacher you promote an informal climate, do not be surprised if you see a group member or two go off like a Fourth of July explosion for no discernible reason. This is the problem any democratic environment faces: where does it place controls on freedom to prevent disturbance from eccentrics? In a formal environment where controls are tightly held, we do not find so much individualistic expression of a disturbing nature; Pandora's box comes open rarely, but when it does—look out! Internal pressures are likely to have developed to a point where the whole group blows up. An informal environment actually acts as a safety valve for the group.

Another disturbing aspect of an informal environment is that it becomes easy for the teacher to fall under attack. If informality and consequent freedom of expression are attained, the teacher becomes as fair game as any

to be criticized and actively opposed. Some may dislike him because he doesn't satisfy their need to be dependent upon him. Some may dislike him because they do not like his looks, his behavior, or his ancestors. In a formal situation controls are such in most cases as to cause hostility toward a teacher to be repressed if it exists. If you promote an informal environment, you should be prepared to take hostility directed your way and you should proceed on the theory that the most productive, wholesome teacher-group relationship will only prevail where you are fair game along with everyone else.

In the usual group a great deal of pressure will build up to find out what the teacher thinks. The dangers of inhibiting creative thinking by premature disclosure of the teacher's views have been described. It makes a difference, however, whether a teacher superimposes his views on a group at the outset, or presents his views as those of one person—in response to a widespread desire within the group to hear his views—only after there has been full expression of viewpoint by members of the group. If these views then have influence in the group, it is more likely to be because they have merit, and not simply because of the status of their advocate. On this basis lectures, or preferably lecturettes, may have a useful function as an adjunct to discussion in communicating to the group the crystallization of the teacher's experience and point of view.

## *AND THE REWARDS*

If the teacher is to exercise constructive influence upon the group, he must have the fullest kind of feedback upon which to arrive at tentative diagnosis about group functioning. He needs to be able to find out what is wrong and sometimes to propose treatment for it; he needs to know whether group members think they are on the proper course.

To gather this information, observation periods have been used during which the group takes a calm look at itself. Post-meeting reaction forms have also been found useful. A feedback device gaining in popularity is that of random writing; group members are asked at reasonable intervals to write at random anything they care to write relative to the operation or subject matter of the group.

By this means teachers are often able to find cues helpful in thinking about their responsibilities to their groups. They are able to set up a personal channel of communication from group members that often taps inner feelings. Here is an actual statement: "This method of writing my thoughts down is helping me to see how opinionated and dogmatic I really am. For this reason I did not throw them (earlier random writings) away. What I feel like writing now is: I need to know how to function in a group. What attitudes do I need to develop? How can I be less dogmatic? How can I present my views without giving offense? How can I develop a sensitivity to others? How can I develop my opinions without 'fixing' them so solidly?"

Using informal methods in ways similar to those described can yield a very satisfactory result. It would be foolish to say that they lead to one hundred percent success; they do not. But extremely positive reactions are not uncommon from people who have been freed from restraints and constrictions of traditionally formal situations through the introduction of informal methods.

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# *IDEAS FOR TECHNICAL TRAINING*

THE PLACE: a laboratory

THE TIME: night, of course

THE CHARACTERS AND SITUATION: one average instructor and several people (a group) who have paid good money to learn, within a specified period of time, the basic procedures of biological laboratory technique, including the use of the microscope.

THE ACTION AND CONVERSATION begin when each person, including the instructor, is seated at a table with an assigned microscope in front of him.

The instructor speaks: "This instrument is the main tool biologists have used to extend the range of our most discriminating sense organ, the eye. The microscope has made it possible to see objects that previously could not be seen at all, so that now these can be included in our shared perceptions.

"Our first problem is to understand something about how microscopes are designed and how to operate one. Then we will be more likely to agree about what our perceptions are, and to see how they may be limited by the characteristics of the microscope itself.

"First, let's learn the names of various parts of the microscope, particularly those concerned with optics and light. Then we'll pay some attention to how a microscope works and gradually acquire skill in its use . . ."

The instructor proceeds to name and point: ". . . condenser . . . diaphragm . . . objectives . . . ocular . . ."

QUESTION: What is about to happen to these people? Granted the subject matter, and the specific technical or professional ends toward which they are heading, does this situation have any relation to liberal education? Could it be called a liberalizing experience? If it is not liberalizing, could it be so? How?

If the instructor in laboratory technique continues along the lines indicated by his opening remarks, he will create a situation for his students which can have certain specific liberalizing effects. The students will increase the number and variety of their symbols within the area of language and mathematics, particularly those symbols that are based on the shared perceptions of men and which can serve for most widespread communication.

They will increase their abilities to manipulate these symbols rationally and logically if they are given a chance to practice doing so.

They will achieve a better specific orientation to the present results of scientific methods. They will know more about the answers provided through accumulated shared perceptions to basic what, where, when, how questions. They may or may not use these answers in their own subjective order-forming systems. If there has to be a good deal of emphasis on content and very little on method, they are not likely to achieve much in the way of a continuing dynamic orientation such as occurs when there is an understanding of methods rather than results. They are not likely to have the time to explore very far the effects on society of applied scientific results, important as these may be in our communication with others and in our social ordering.

It may seem trite to talk about involvement and participation. But the best way to make a liberalizing experience out of a professional or technical course is to help people to do things themselves and think things out themselves. Let's not have copybook questions with copybook answers but open-ended questions that call for original thinking and the manipulation of the new symbols and meanings. Not canned experiments, with results to be copied out of the textbook but real problems, methodological problems. The earliest microscopes operated by moving the object up and down to get it into focus. Modern microscopes move the lenses. Why?

Below is a table of practical suggestions that any leader can use to help him get the most liberalizing results possible in teaching a specific technical or professional subject matter.

**IF YOU WANT TO GET**

**THE MOST LIBERAL EFFECT**

**FROM A TECHNICAL SUBJECT:**

**if you can—**

1. Let them do it.
2. Use words PLUS models, diagrams, pictures.
3. Show its roots and related meanings.
4. Get them to *use* the idea the word stands for.
5. Let them discover for themselves.
6. Provide the data or premises and let them do it.
7. Also relate it to a general one.
8. Take it off to show how it works.
9. Better orient them to history and the minds of other men.
10. Enrich their symbols by your communication.
11. Also use examples from others.
12. Provide books, pamphlets, related materials to take advantage of every bit of awakened interest.

**don't—**

1. Do it for them.
2. Use words alone.
3. Leave a technical word unexplained.
4. Accept "parrot" words.
5. Tell them what the results will be or should be.
6. Draw a conclusion.
7. Stick to the details of a specific problem.
8. Leave the cover on the machine.
9. Omit times and places and personalities involved in events or discoveries.
10. Hide your own associations with a word, or idea, or concept.
11. Illustrate with material from our own culture only.
12. Say, "That material is outside the subject." ◇◇

# *WHEN STUDENTS DROP OUT*

**Adult Education leaders** have been worried about drop-outs and enrollment turnover for a number of years, but in spite of very real efforts to overcome the difficulty, the problem still remains.

Poe School decided that the first thing it would do in tackling the problem would be to get in touch with those students who had dropped out and find out from them why they had left school. Teachers were asked to send a postcard or letter to any pupil who had been out for two or three consecutive class meetings, suggesting that the student had been missed and wondering whether he was planning to return. Absentees who did not respond to the cards or letters within a two-week period were counted as drop-outs along with such students as had been out for so long a time that it was obvious they would not be back.

**A double postcard** was sent to all drop-outs. One of the cards, addressed to the student, explained why the survey was being made. The other card, addressed to the school, carried a checklist to be answered by the ex-pupil. The checklist read as follows:

A. Please check the one reason that best describes your reason for leaving night school.

——— 1. Must work nights

——— 2. School work not interesting

——— 3. Illness

——— 4. Going to school elsewhere

——— 5. Other reasons (Please list)

_____

_____

B. Answer "yes" or "no."
Do you intend to return to evening school?

yes ——— no ———

44 Please tear off and mail now!----------

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# *ADULTS EVALUATE THEMSELVES*

"ANYTHING which exists, exists in some quantity and is hence susceptible to measurement." So runs the scientist's maxim. Educators on the whole agree with this dictum and have hence devoted a great deal of time and energy to the development of tests, examinations and a vast array of other methods for evaluating the consequences of their work. Very few of these devices are applicable to adult education.

Why is this so? Why is it not reasonable to regard adult education as an extension of all previous education? After all, learning is learning, no matter when or where it takes place. Failure to understand the inner meaning of this question, and hence inability to find a satisfying answer, is the chief factor which accounts for so many false starts and so many disappointing ventures in adult education. Adult education is unlike conventional education in this important respect: it is wholly lacking in coercive or compulsive elements. Adult education is an act of free will, and from this important fact many other distinctions naturally follow. A mediocre teacher, using inappropriate teaching methods, may go on teaching for years without being detected, so long as he is protected by a compulsory system of attendance. Not so in adult education. The teacher of adults will have pupils only if he meets their current needs and is able to interest them sufficiently to evoke the will to learn.

When the above distinction is clearly understood, all thinking and planning about adult education falls into an orderly and logical pattern. One sees at once, for example, that ordinary tests and examinations will not suffice to determine success and failure in adult education. Adult students cannot be compelled to take examinations. Nor would examinations constitute a reliable index of success

or failure. What precisely is it we want to know about the adult learner and his experience as a student?

The first and most important conclusion we have thus far reached may be stated thus: *In adult education, methods of evaluation must exemplify that same sense of freedom which characterizes the learning process itself.* In other words, methods of evaluation should be internal, not imposed from without. Adult learners, in short, must also learn how to evaluate their own success or failure. What the adult learner needs to know is whether or not his learning is effecting any kind of change in him. Once having learned how to appraise change, he will want to know how to detect the direction in which he is moving. In the experiments thus far conducted, it turns out that adult trade union members involved in the study of international affairs wish to know how this study has changed them in the following ways:

1. Has it increased my usable fund of *reliable information?* Curiously enough, it is not the mere accumulation of new facts which seemed to concern them most. The principal features of their concern appeared to be (1) the relationship between different bodies of fact, and (2) ways of distinguishing the various grades of reliability of information.
2. Have I changed my *vocabulary?* Have I, in other words, learned how to make use of some *new concepts?* This question naturally leads to consideration of semantics and modern propaganda methods.
3. Have I acquired any new *skills?* In one seminar the participants placed special emphasis upon the fact that they had learned how to interpret statistical tables and graphs. In another, stress was placed upon improvement in the skill of using reference books.
4. Have I learned how to make reliable *generalizations?* Such generalizations are the result of bringing disrelated facts into meaningful relationships.
5. Have I learned how to sort out the *moral ingredients* in the various situations considered by this study group? Have I learned to think in terms of values?
6. Have I altered any *attitudes?* An attitude is a predisposition to act in a certain way in response to a given stimulus. Basic attitudes do not, as a rule,

change suddenly. But even in the short period of two weeks it was discovered that important attitude changes were taking place. For example, one of the considerations dealt with the general question: "How do international relations affect my job?" When this question was clarified it became obvious that members of the seminar were in the process of changing their attitudes toward international matters from passivity to active concern.

The above categories of evaluation are not intended to be inclusive. There are other items of information which adult learners would, no doubt, like to know about themselves. This list is, however, sufficiently inclusive for most purposes. But more important still, it has been found that adult learners will respond to this type of self-examination. These are evaluation terms which they understand and quickly learn how to use.

Answers to the above six basic questions about the adult learner and his experience as a student may be secured in at least three different ways, namely:

*1.* The entire study group may engage in orderly *discussion.* The method of discussion which lends itself best to this type of inquiry is *circular response.* (Each of the members, seated in a circle, speaks in turn.) This method requires complete participation on the part of all members of the group. It eliminates argumentation and refutation and assumes that persons who have shared a similar experience are capable of engaging in a cooperative evaluation of that experience.

*2.* The group may be sub-divided into *smaller units.* In these units the method used may be informal, of the nature of well-ordered conversation.

*3.* Each participant may be asked to engage in self-evaluation by means of *questionnaires.* This method has been found to be the least fruitful but it is our aim to experiment further in the hope that independent, written responses may reveal certain shades of meaning which do not emerge from group discussion.

Our second general assumption leads to another variety of evaluation. We assume that adult education is

distinguished from formal education by the fact that the latter tends always towards standardization and formalism, whereas the former, adult education, demands a high degree of *flexibility*. Adult students are sensitive with respect to this question. This is as it should be because flexibility is an index to freedom. But what degree of flexibility is desirable? How many adult students and their teachers engage in a joint educational enterprise in which there is readiness to change directions without losing the sense of sequence and orderliness? One experiment in which an attempt was made to follow this principle involved the appointment of a "steering committee" composed of students and teachers. This committee met regularly throughout the seminar and reported intermittently to the entire group. This was only in part successful and it is our intention to experiment with other methods in the future.

Our third general assumption from which still another conception of evaluation emerges may be stated thus: In every genuine adult education enterprise it happens that the individuals who participate tend to become a *true group*. The principal distinction to be made here, that is, between true groups and mechanical collectivities, pseudo-groups, is this: the former tend always in the direction of fellowship and friendship, whereas the latter tend always to create a semblance of unity through concealed coercions. The dynamics of true groups arise from that variety of unity which comes through the creative use of differences. What is the nature of the process here involved? This question, we believe, cannot be satisfactorily answered by an "outside" observer. Only participants will know how true groups come into existence and what dynamic principles they follow. Participants who are examining themselves in the light of the six evaluation categories listed above will also want to know what is happening to them as members of this particular group. Are they sensitive to the way in which others respond to them? Do they know at what point they begin to feel a sense of really belonging to the group? Was there any moment when they felt they might be losing their individuality? Becoming subservient to the group? These are questions of an extremely subtle character and no simple methods of evaluation have thus far been invented. ◇◇

# *INTRODUCING THE AEA*

The AEA (Adult Education Association of the United States of America) is a non-profit organization founded in May, 1951, as an instrument for developing a united adult education movement. The general purposes of AEA, as stated in its Constitution, are:

—"To further the concept of adult education as a process continuing throughout life.

—"To promote and develop adult education in the United States by affording opportunities to professional and non-professional adult educators to increase their competence and by encouraging and assisting organizations and agencies . . . to develop adult education activities and to work together in the interests of adult education.

—"To receive and disseminate information about adult education.

—"To promote the balanced development of educational services for adult persons in the United States.

—"To cooperate with adult education agencies internationally."

United in the AEA to further these purposes through a program including field services, conferences, publications, and public relations, are over 12,000 men and women who work with adults in formal and informal educational and training programs. These leaders represent every sector of American society—education, labor, agriculture, industry, religion, social welfare, government service, and a host of voluntary associations.

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